

CRS Report for Congress

Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy

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Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy

Summary

Iraq's neighbors have influenced events in Iraq since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, and developments in Iraq have had political, economic, and security implications for Iraq's neighbors and the broader Middle East. Ongoing violence in Iraq and discussion of options for modifying U.S. policy toward Iraq are fueling consideration of Iraq's future and the current and potential policies by Iraq's neighbors. Policymakers and observers are considering a number of different "Iraq scenarios," ranging from the resolution of outstanding Iraqi political disputes and the successful consolidation of Iraq's government and security forces, to a return of sectarian violence and the potential for greater intervention by Iraq's neighbors.

Understanding regional perspectives on Iraq and the potential nature and likelihood of regional responses to various scenarios will be essential for Members of the 110th Congress as they consider the future of U.S. policy, including post-troop surge tactical options, the proposed U.S.-Iraq security agreement, and annual appropriations and authorization legislation. The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq released in August 2007 assessed that "Iraq's neighbors will continue to focus on improving their leverage in Iraq in anticipation of a Coalition drawdown." The NIE identified Iranian assistance to armed groups and the "reluctance" of Iraq's Sunni Arab neighbors to support the Iraqi government as particularly problematic.

This report provides information about the current perspectives and policies of Iraq's neighbors; analyzes potential regional responses to continued insurgency, sectarian and ethnic violence, and long-term stabilization; discusses shared concerns and U.S. long-term regional interests; and reviews U.S. policy options for responding to various contingencies. For more information on Iraq and regional perspectives, see CRS Report RL31339, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security*; CRS Report RS22079, *The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq*; and CRS Report RS22323, *Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq*. This report will be updated to reflect major developments.

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Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy

Regional perspectives on the conflict in Iraq and the nature of potential responses by Iraq's neighbors will be relevant to Members of the 110th Congress as they consider post-troop surge tactical options, the proposed U.S.-Iraq security agreement, and annual appropriations and authorization legislation. Principal current concerns include alleged Iranian political, financial, and military support for various Iraqi Shiite political parties and militia groups; Turkish military operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party in northern Iraq; and Sunni Arab states' anxiety about the future of Iraq's minority Sunni Arab population and the growth of Iran's regional influence. Longer term concerns focus on the challenges likely to arise during the reintegration of a deeply changed Iraq into the region's strategic military balance and global economic and energy markets.

Iraq and other regional security problems, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the enduring threat of transnational terrorism, Iran's nuclear program, and the ongoing political crisis in Lebanon, have become increasingly intertwined. Some observers believe that, in order for the United States and its allies to reach a sustainable reconciliation and find a lasting solution in Iraq, related regional crises also must be addressed. Others contend that lasting resolutions to these problems can only be secured according to their own time-lines and that efforts to link them to the stabilization of Iraq are unlikely to produce desirable results. The Iraq Study Group and others have argued that if Iraqis are unable to resolve their differences and rein in armed groups, then Iraq could descend further into violence, and Iraq's neighbors might intervene to defend their perceived national interests. Should Iraq stabilize, Iraq's neighbors are expected to deepen their economic and political re-engagement with Iraqis while seeking to minimize the potential for the post-Saddam Iraq to threaten their security or regional standing.

Common Questions, Unique Concerns

The United States, Iraq's neighbors, and Iraqi political groups have distinct views and interests with regard to a common set of policy questions about Iraq's future. As observers of and participants in Iraqi affairs, Iraq's neighbors are seeking to understand and influence changes in the following five areas:

- the regional strategic balance;
- prospects for sectarian and ethnic violence (in Iraq and elsewhere);
- the strength of Iraq-based transnational terrorist groups;
- the status of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons; and
- the emergence of viable long term economic opportunities.

The manner in which the United States and regional parties prioritize and pursue their interests in these areas will determine whether greater cooperation or confrontation define Iraq's future and its long-term relations with its neighbors.

The Regional Strategic Balance and Political Stability. The removal of the Saddam Hussein regime upset the tenuous political and economic balance that had existed in the Persian Gulf region since the end of the 1991 Gulf War. In political and military terms, the regime's fall and the subsequent dismantling of Iraq's armed forces removed a potential military threat to the Arab Gulf states but also eliminated the region's principal strategic counterweight to Iran. Subsequent elections have installed a Shiite-dominated government, some of whose members are friendly to Iranian interests. In economic terms, the termination of the U.N. sanctions on Iraq created new trade and investment opportunities that have contributed to regional economic growth but remain limited by ongoing violence. Other trends that have defined the postwar environment in Iraq are reflected elsewhere in the region and are creating significant concern among regional powers: the mobilization of populations along ethnic or sectarian lines and the emboldening of politically affiliated, armed non-state actors have upended established patterns of rule and created challenges to central government authority.¹

From the U.S. perspective, regime change in Iraq brought an end to the need for a policy of containment toward Iraq and the attendant U.S. military posture that had supported it since the end of the 1991 Gulf War. Stabilization and training efforts in Iraq, regional counterterrorism activities, and the potential for confrontation with Iran have replaced containment of Saddam's Iraq as the principal strategic drivers of the U.S. military presence in the region. Subsequent developments in Iraq and the region will affect future consideration of U.S. basing, access, and pre-positioning needs and, by extension, bilateral relations between the United States and a number of regional governments.² Containment of violence in Iraq and potential Iranian threats to neighboring countries or international shipping in the Persian Gulf may emerge as strategic concerns that could require significant changes to U.S. policy and military presence in the region.

Sectarian and Ethnic Politics and Violence. The hardening of sectarian and ethnic identities in Iraq has created significant anxiety among Iraq's neighbors, many of whom also have religiously and ethnically diverse populations. Sunni Arab governments and religious figures have characterized the empowerment of Iraq's Shiite Arabs and close relationships between the Iranian government and some Iraqi and non-Iraqi Shiite political parties and armed groups as evidence of an emerging and potentially hostile "Shiite crescent." Sunni Arabs in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt also have accused Iraqi Shiite militia groups and Shiite-dominated Iraqi security forces of targeting Sunni Arab civilians. Similarly, Shiites outside of Iraq have expressed alarm about the targeting of Iraqi Shiite civilians by Sunni Arab-led insurgent and terrorist groups and the potential for Sunni Arab-led governments to

¹ For a discussion of these trends, see Graham Fuller, "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Winter 2006-2007.

² See Dr. W. Andrew Terrill, *Regional Fears of Western Primacy and the Future of U.S. Middle Eastern Basing Policy*, U.S. Army War College, December 15, 2006.

intervene in Iraqi affairs to the detriment of Iraqi Shiites. Turkish concerns about Kurdish separatism and the fate of Iraq's ethnically-Turkish Turkoman minority group are well documented and drive Turkish policy regarding Iraq.

The post-Saddam strengthening of Iraqi Shiite political parties and the Shiite *hawza*, or religious establishment in An Najaf also have regional implications. Both phenomena contribute to concern in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain that indigenous Shiite Arabs may become more politically active or hostile, based on the example of Iraq's empowered Shiite population or in response to future pronouncements from Iraq-based clerics. Sectarian tension continues to characterize Bahrain's domestic politics, and Saudi Arabia's minority Shiite population has come under renewed scrutiny from some Sunni Saudis in spite of a recent trend toward rapprochement. Iran, the traditional target of Sunni Arab concerns about Shiite interference, also may harbor concerns that clerics in An Najaf could challenge or undermine the religious authority of the *hawza* in the Iranian city of Qom.

Transnational and Nationalist Terrorism. The United States and Iraq's neighbors have expressed concern about the establishment and growth of various transnational terrorist organizations in Iraq since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. Ongoing conflict and the inexperience of Iraq's security establishment create the potential for a chaotic Iraq to serve as an ungoverned space that terrorist organizations can exploit. Under the late Jordanian terrorist leader Abu Musab al Zarqawi, Al Qaeda in Iraq grew to embody these fears by creating a sophisticated Iraqi and regional terrorist network that claimed responsibility for deadly attacks in neighboring Jordan. Ethnic nationalist terrorist organizations such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK/MKO), the Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) pose similar transnational threats to Turkey and Iran. From a U.S. perspective, these groups may contribute to regional instability if their activities provoke hostile responses by Iraq's neighbors, as PKK terrorist attacks in Turkey have in provoking Turkish operations in northern Iraq.³

Broader international concerns focus on the foreign fighters who continue to travel to Iraq. Although the overall numbers of volunteers reportedly remain limited and their survival rates are reported to be quite low, the foreign fighter phenomenon has led many observers to suspect that non-Iraqi fighters who survive their experiences in Iraq may attempt to follow the example of the so-called "Afghan Arab" veterans of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan by returning to their countries of origin or traveling to other conflict zones and helping to ignite and sustain insurgencies and terrorist campaigns. Recent research has determined that experienced "Afghan Arab" fighters and their recent trainees formed the core cadre of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and contributed to the group's lethality and resilience in the face of Saudi counter-terrorism efforts.⁴ Coordination between the

³ The MEK is designated by the U.S. government as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). The U.S. military and U.S. intelligence services disarmed and screened 3,000 MEK members present in Iraq, who remain at a facility northeast of Baghdad known as Camp Ashraf. They have been granted "protected persons" status under the Geneva Conventions.

⁴ See Thomas Hegghammer, "Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization in Saudi Arabia," (continued...)

United States, regional governments, and the wider international community may be required to effectively stem any eventual reverse flow of volunteers from Iraq.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. The conflict in Iraq has produced a serious humanitarian situation for millions of Iraqis who have become internally displaced or have fled Iraq to other regional countries. Non-Iraqi refugees within Iraq also have suffered. Iraq's neighbors are faced with the dual pressures of responding to the displaced Iraqis reaching their borders as well as to the needs of Iraqis and non-Iraqis displaced within Iraq. At the popular level, strong religious charitable imperatives and the bonds of ethnicity and sectarian concern have produced calls for greater involvement, while, in some countries, the massive influx of Iraqi refugees has created economic and political disruptions. The United Nations continues to call on the countries of the region and the international community to coordinate a more effective relief response. In the event of wider or lasting civil conflict, those needs could increase substantially.

Table 1. Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

| Refugees and IDPs in Iraq | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq | 2,770,000 |
| Iraqi Refugees in the Region | |
| Jordan | 450-500,000 |
| Syria | 1,200,000-1,500,000 |
| Lebanon | 20-50,000 |
| Iran | 57,000 |
| Gulf States | >200,000 |
| Turkey | 10,000 |
| Egypt | 100,000 |
| Total | 1,567,470 |

Source: Internal displacement update for Iraq by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis, April 1, 2008; Supplementary Appeal - Iraq Situation Response, Jan. 2007, and Statistics on Displaced Iraqis around the World, April 2007.

a. The term "bidoon" refers to Bedouin Arabs and others who do not hold or have not been granted citizenship in any of the region's countries.

Economic Opportunities. Iraq's vast energy resources, its large consumer market, and its position as a geographic crossroads make it an attractive economic partner for its neighbors and the international community. However, since 2003, the lingering effects of over a decade of international sanctions and continuing postwar

⁴ (...continued)

Middle East Policy, Vol. XIII, No. 4, Winter 2006.

violence have created conditions that limit the ability of Iraq's neighbors to expand trade with and investment in Iraq to its full potential. Bilateral and intra-regional trade levels have increased from the Saddam era, especially with regard to regional demand for Iraq's energy resources. However, ongoing violence has limited the extent to which entities and individuals in the region have been willing and able to invest and conduct business in Iraq. Over the medium to long term, the rehabilitation of Iraq's oil production infrastructure and the expansion of exploration and production are expected to increase the availability of oil and refined petroleum products in the region, but may also create production quota competition within OPEC and affect prices and consumption patterns in global energy markets.

Iraq's Future

The diversity of political actors in Iraq and the confluence of regional and international policy problems with Iraqi affairs complicate efforts to predict the course of events in Iraq. As U.S. policy and circumstances in Iraq and the region have changed since 2003, the perspectives and policies of Iraq's neighbors have evolved. Looking forward, Iraq's neighbors can be expected to react differently to different scenarios and U.S. policy choices. The following discussion uses a scenario-based framework to illustrate challenges that may confront the United States and Iraq's neighbors during the term of the 110th Congress and beyond.⁵

Continued Insurgency and Disorder? From mid-2003 through early 2006, the foremost concerns of U.S. policymakers and the new Iraqi government were the Sunni-led insurgency against coalition and Iraqi forces, the presence of foreign terrorist operatives in Iraq, and the growth of organized criminal activity such as kidnaping, extortion, and drug trafficking. These problems remain serious and will need to be addressed by U.S., Iraqi, and regional policy makers over the short term. Iran and Turkey have engaged directly with Iraq's Kurdish and Shiite Arab populations, respectively, in order to secure their interests and guard against some of the potentially negative implications of these problems. However, Iran's intervention on behalf of Iraq's Shiites may be contributing to the persistence of Sunni-led resistance activities and Iraq's Kurds remain wary of Turkish intentions, particularly in the wake of Turkish military operations in northern Iraq during late 2007 and early 2008.

Relations between Iraq and its Sunni Arab neighbors remain characterized by limited diplomatic engagement, limited investment and trade, and general reluctance among Sunni Arab governments to embrace the Iraqi government. In much of the Arab world, governments and citizens remain divided on the question of whether the U.S. military presence in Iraq is an ultimately stabilizing or aggravating factor. Most Arab governments fear a general failure of the new Iraqi government and the prospect of chaos that could leave Iraq's minority Sunni Arab population vulnerable or create opportunities for terrorist elements to prosper. Many Arab citizens oppose the continuing U.S. military presence in Iraq, and some view the current Iraqi

⁵ See Alan Schwartz, *Scenarios for the Insurgency in Iraq*, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Special Report No. 174, October 2006; and Neil King Jr. and Greg Jaffe, "Widening War? If Iraq Worsens, Allies See 'Nightmare' Case," *Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 2007.

government as an illegitimate outgrowth of U.S. occupation. Reconciling these differences of opinion is likely to remain difficult and could complicate efforts to secure the cooperation of Iraq's Arab neighbors with new stabilization initiatives.

Sectarian or Ethnic Civil War? In addition to responding to the security threats that have persisted since 2003, U.S. forces embarked throughout 2007 on efforts to reduce sectarian and ethnic violence, which seriously jeopardized U.S. security goals and prevented the emergence of a stable Iraqi government. The bombing of an important Shiite mosque in the Iraqi city of Al Samarra in February 2006 exacerbated cycles of retaliatory sectarian attacks between Sunnis and Shiites that continued in earnest through early 2007, leading many observers to characterize the violence between rival communities and militias as the beginnings of a civil war.⁶ Since November 2007, U.S. and Iraqi officials have presented statistics showing a dramatic drop in sectarian violence — attributing the progress to the U.S. troop surge and the “ceasefire” of the Shiite Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) militia affiliated with cleric Moqtada Al Sadr.

The return of widespread sectarian violence could rekindle domestic pressure on the governments of Iraq's neighbors to intervene on behalf of members of specific sects or ethnic groups. Wider conflict or outside intervention in turn could exacerbate humanitarian crises inside Iraq and speed the flow of Iraqi refugees to neighboring countries. Members of Congress may be asked to consider various potential U.S. responses to interventions by Iraq's neighbors in any return to widespread sectarian or ethnic conflict.

A Stable Iraq? The Administration has claimed success in reversing the deterioration in security that became acute by the end of 2006, attributing the sizable reductions in violence to a “troop surge” strategy announced by President Bush on January 10, 2007. Some critics contend that, security improvements notwithstanding, the strategy has not, to date, accomplished its primary intent — to use improved security conditions to achieve political reconciliation among Iraq's major communities — and that any security gains are therefore tenuous. The Administration believes that the current U.S. strategy, if continued with only modest reduction in U.S. forces and continued building of Iraq's security forces, is likely to produce a central government able to defend itself and more likely to achieve the measures of reconciliation envisioned by the Iraqi government, the Administration, and Congress.

In considering longer term possibilities for Iraq's stability and unity, the United States and Iraq's neighbors are seeking to determine and influence “which Iraq” will emerge from the current chaotic situation. Faced with the prospect of destabilizing violence in Iraq or terrorist threats from Iraq-based entities, such as Al Qaeda and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Iraq's neighbors may welcome the long term consolidation of strong central government control in Iraq as opposed to federal arrangements that leave local security responsibilities in the hands of weaker or less responsive regional governments. On the other hand, some analysts have argued that the “demonstration effect” of a united, democratic Iraq in which Islamist political

⁶ The Al Askari Mosque in Al Samarra was bombed on February 22, 2006.

parties, Shiites, and ethnic minority groups are represented in government and are allowed to participate freely would create political pressure on neighboring countries, where similar parties and groups do not enjoy comparable opportunities.⁷

A stable Iraq, its neighbors, and the United States also will need to reconcile several outstanding differences in order to define the new Iraqi government's role in the region's economic and strategic environment. Long term questions about key issues remain unresolved and could prove to be divisive, such as:

- Iraq's participation in OPEC and the Gulf Cooperation Council;⁸
- Iraq's future ability to project military force beyond its borders;
- the presence in Iraq of U.S. or other military bases or personnel; and
- the new Iraq's sovereign economic, political, and military relations with regional powers such as Iran and Syria and with global powers such as China and Russia.

Figure 1. Iraq and its Neighbors



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (1/2007).

⁷ See Joseph McMillan, "Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion, and an Enduring Rivalry," USIP, Special Report No. 157, January 2006.

⁸ The GCC members are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.

Iraq's Neighbors: Perspectives and Policies

Official policy statements and independent sources of analysis are available that help to illustrate regional governments' perspectives and policies on Iraq. Nevertheless, there remain inherent limits on the ability of outside observers to fully understand and describe the priorities, perspectives, and policies of foreign governments, particularly on an issue of such fluidity and importance. The influence of broader regional and international issues such as the Arab-Israeli peace process and Iran's nuclear program further complicate analysis. With these limits in mind, the profiles below seek to define the key interests of Iraq's neighbors, review their diplomatic engagement and trade with post-Saddam Iraq, and discuss their perspectives on Iraq's future in light of the issues and scenarios outlined above.

Iran⁹

Perspectives and Interests. Iran's interests in Iraq reflect its longstanding regional ambitions as well as its desire to affect its ongoing dispute with the United States over nuclear technology development and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Iran views Iraq's majority Shiite Arab population as a potential strategic asset in light of these interests, and thus, Iran's overall goals in Iraq have differed little from the main emphasis of U.S. policy — establishing a democratic process that reflects majority preferences and thereby empowers potential Shiite allies. Iran sees continued control by Iraq's diverse Shiite parties as providing Iran with "strategic depth" and ensuring that Iraq remains pliable and attentive to Iran's interests. However, Iran's reputed aid to some Iraqi Shiite parties and their militias has contributed to escalating sectarian violence that is undermining U.S. stabilization efforts and threatening U.S. efforts to strengthen the central government.

Policy Priorities. In the first three years after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iran's leaders and diplomats worked to persuade all Shiite Islamist factions in Iraq to work together through the U.S.-orchestrated political process, because the number of Shiites in Iraq (roughly 60% of the population) virtually ensures Shiite predominance of government. Iran's strategy bore fruit with victory by a Shiite Islamist bloc (the "United Iraqi Alliance" or UIA) in the two National Assembly elections in 2005. The UIA bloc, which won 128 of the 275 Assembly seats in the December 15, 2005 election, includes Iran's primary Shiite Islamist proteges in Iraq — the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Dawa (Islamic Call) party. Prior to 2007, the UIA also had the support of the faction of the mercurial young Shiite cleric Moqtada al Sadr, but Sadr's faction withdrew from the UIA in September 2007 after the United States insisted that the Iraqi government allow U.S. forces to pursue Mahdi Army (*Jaysh al-Mahdi*, JAM) militiamen as part of the 2007 "troop surge."

Like his predecessor as Prime Minister, Ibrahim al Jafari, the current Prime Minister, Nouri al Maliki, is from the Dawa Party. Al Maliki spent most of his exile in Syria. Most ISCI leaders spent their years of exile in Iran, and the organization is

⁹ Prepared by Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle East Affairs. See also CRS Report RS22323, *Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq*, by Kenneth Katzman.

considered to be the most pro-Iranian of Iraq's Shiite political groups. The Sadr faction's ties to Iran were initially less extensive because his family remained in Iraq during Saddam's rule. Still, the Sadr clan has ideological ties to Iran; Moqtada al Sadr's great uncle, Mohammad Baqr Al Sadr, was a political ally of Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and was hung by Saddam Hussein in 1980. Iran later came to see Sadr's faction — which has 30 seats in parliament, a large and dedicated following, particularly among lower-class Iraqi Shiites — as a growing force in Iraq.

Since 2006, U.S. and allied officials have emphasized the adverse aspects of Iranian policy — its purported financial and materiel support to the Shiite militias discussed above. On several occasions, senior U.S. commanders in Iraq have provided specific information, including displaying captured weaponry, that Iran's "Qods Force" - the force within Iran's Revolutionary Guard that conducts operations outside Iran's borders — has supplied to Shiite militias in Iraq. This includes explosives (including highly lethal "explosively forced projectiles," or EFP's) and other weaponry. On August 7, 2007, the operational commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, said that EFP's accounted for one-third of the 79 U.S. troop deaths in July 2007, and that the Shiite militias accounted for 73% of the attacks that killed or wounded U.S. soldiers that month. He added that Iran had supplied the Shiite militias with 122 millimeter mortars.¹⁰

In November 2007, U.S. officials said that an August 2007 Iranian pledge to Maliki to stop arming Iraqi militias was being implemented to some extent. Since December 2007, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, Secretary of Defense Gates, and Gen. Petraeus have reported that Shiite militia attacks on U.S. forces and Iranian weapons shipments had diminished, although there was a rise in Iranian shipments into Iraq in early January 2008. However, these officials and other reports say that Iran continues to assist and organize the special groups of militiamen, which are believed responsible for occasional mortar and rocket attacks on U.S. installations in Baghdad. State Department officials attribute the decline in Iranian weapons to bilateral diplomacy with Iran, but Defense Department officials attributed the decline to U.S. counter-measures, such as arrests of Qods Force agents and raids on arms caches. Some experts believe that Iran has decided to reduce its military involvement in Iraq to counter the anti-Tehran backlash it observes among Iraqi Shiite civilians.

Iran's reported support for violent activities in Iraq might be designed to develop a broader range of options that include sponsoring sectarian violence to pressure U.S. and British forces to leave Iraq or to deter the United States from action against Iran to curb its purported nuclear ambitions. On the other hand, Iran might not necessarily want to support attacks on U.S. forces because a U.S. departure from Iraq, if that were the result, might leave the pro-Iranian government vulnerable to well-organized and well-trained Sunni insurgents, many of whom were officers in the former Iraqi military. Shiite militia attacks on Sunni Arab civilians also could produce unrest that would undermine the Iraqi government. Those who take this view tend to believe that Iran is aiding Shiite militias not to instigate attacks on the United States

¹⁰ Gordon, Michael, "U.S. Says Iran-Supplied Bomb Is Killing More Troops in Iraq," *New York Times*, August 8, 2007.

but instead as a means of increasing its influence over the Iraqi Shiite factions that field these forces.

In an effort to try to limit opportunities for Iran to act against U.S. interests in Iraq, the United States has begun a dialogue with Iranian officials on the issue of Iraqi stability and Iran's aid to Shiite militias. The issue of U.S.-Iran talks on the Iraq issue was brought to the fore by the Iraq Study Group report, issued in December 2006, that recommended that the United States open multilateral talks with both Iran and Syria to enlist their assistance in stabilizing Iraq. Other experts believed Iran would neither be willing nor necessarily able to assist U.S. policy in Iraq,¹¹ and, in an interview with journalists on December 14, 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice appeared to reject the Study Group recommendation by saying that the United States would not likely bargain with Iran to obtain its assistance in stabilizing Iraq.¹²

However, perhaps in part to demonstrate that it is implementing the Iraq Study Group report as part of broader new efforts in 2007 to bring stability to Iraq (the "New Way Forward," encompassing a "surge" of U.S. forces in Baghdad and Anbar Province), the Administration subsequently began talks with Iran. The United States supported and attended an Iraq-sponsored regional conference in Baghdad on March 10, 2007. Iran and Syria attended, as did the United States, with most participants terming the discussions "constructive." Both Secretary of State Rice and Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki attended the follow up meeting in Egypt during May 3-4, 2007, but held no substantive bilateral discussions, according to both sides.

The two countries subsequently held a high profile meeting in Baghdad on May 28, 2007, hosted by Maliki and confined to the Iraq issue. U.S. officials said both sides presented similar visions of governance in Iraq, but U.S. officials said the dialogue would be evaluated by whether the United States saw evidence that Iran was ending some of the arming and training activity discussed earlier. Another round of talks was held on July 24; it reportedly included mutual accusations but resulted in an agreement to establish a working group to discuss ways to stabilize Iraq. This working group met for the first time on August 6, 2007. The talks have been headed on the U.S. side by Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and on the Iranians side by its Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, who was appointed in May 2006.

Economic and Diplomatic Relations. At the same time, some aspects of Iran's civilian cooperation with Iraq do not appear to conflict with U.S. interests. A December 2006 publication of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization shows that Iraq is now the second largest market for Iran's non-oil exports, accounting for about \$1 billion in Iranian exports during January - September 2006.¹³ Iran has offered Iraq a \$1 billion credit line as well, some of which is to be used to build a new airport near

¹¹ Kenneth Pollack, "Don't Count on Iran to Pick Up the Pieces," *New York Times*, December 8, 2006.

¹² Glenn Kessler, "Rice Rejects Overture to Iran and Syria," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2006.

¹³ "Trade Performance of Islamic Republic of Iran (From 2005 - 2006)." Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, Trade Planning Division. December 2006.

An Najaf. The two are also developing a “free trade zone” at the southern Iraqi city of Basra. During exchanges in July 2005, the two countries signed military cooperation agreements, as well as agreements to open diplomatic facilities in Basra and Karbala (two major cities in Iraq’s mostly Shiite south) and agreements on new transportation and energy links, including oil swaps and possibly future oil pipeline connections.

In March 2008, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Baghdad and announced a “new page” in bilateral relations between the former adversaries. Iraqi leaders, including President Jalal Talibani and Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki spoke positively about Iraq-Iran relations and oversaw the signing of several bilateral agreements reportedly concerning customs, transportation, education, and insurance, among other issues. U.S. officials, according to observers, have sought to ensure that any military cooperation between the Iraqi government and Iran remains limited to joint border security, intelligence sharing on cross-border threats, smuggling prevention, and similar issues, and does not expand to Iranian training or arming of Iraqi government forces.

Potential Responses. Although Iran appears to be benefitting from Iraq’s current political structure, events in Iraq might possibly rebound to Iran’s disadvantage. Were a secular, strong Arab nationalist leader, whether Sunni or Shiite, to emerge in Iraq, Iran might face a far less pliable Baghdad than it does now. Such a government might serve as an inspiration to Iran’s Arab population (about 3% of the population), which is concentrated in Khuzestan Province (across the border from Basra). Iran has faced some anti-government bombings and other unrest there in 2006, although not necessarily related to events in Iraq. A nationalist government in Iraq might also emphasize bilateral disputes that existed during Saddam’s rule, such as the border demarcation along the Shatt al Arab waterway, and forcefully demand return of the approximately 150 Iraqi combat aircraft still in Iran that were flown there after the start of the 1991 Gulf war. An alternate government might even reverse the current government’s threats to expel from Iraq the approximately 4,000 operatives of the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK/MKO) under U.S.-led coalition guard at Camp Ashraf, or support the Iranian Kurdish opposition Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan.

Even if Iraq is stabilized under leadership similar to that now in power in Iraq, various alternative scenarios might not necessarily be beneficial to Iran. Some analysts believe that Iran’s clerical leadership fears a successful non-cleric-led democracy in Iraq because that outcome would increase pressure for political liberalization in Iran — and maybe for an end to clerical rule there. Others feel that a stable Iraq would help the traditional center of Shiite theology, An Najaf, reassert itself to the detriment of Iran’s holy city of Qom, which benefitted during Saddam’s secular rule in Iraq. On the other hand, Iran’s position might be enhanced if its main ally, ISCI, succeeds in establishing a large Shiite region in southern Iraq. Such a region would presumably cooperate extensively with Iran on oil, electricity, and road linkages, and facilitate and protect the flow of Iranian pilgrims to the Shiite holy sites at An Najaf and Karbala.

Turkey¹⁴

Perspectives and Interests. Turkey's bilateral relationship with Iraq since the 1991 Gulf war has been defined by Turkish fears about Kurdish separatism and ambiguity toward the regime of Saddam Hussein and the new Iraqi government. After the 1991 Gulf war, Turkey allowed U.S. and British planes flying from Incirlik Air Base to enforce a no-fly zone over northern Iraq (Operation Provide Comfort/Operation Northern Watch) to protect Iraq's Kurds from Saddam Hussein and to monitor Iraq's armed forces. Turkish leaders expressed serious concerns about U.S. regime change plans before the 2003 invasion and, on March 1, 2003, the Turkish parliament refused to authorize the deployment of U.S. forces to Turkey for the purpose of opening a northern front against Iraq.

It is difficult to exaggerate Turkey's anxiety about Iraq and its future. Turkish officials say that they want a stable, democratic, and unified Iraq to emerge from the current chaotic environment. Foremost, they want Iraq to maintain its territorial integrity and view preventing the creation of ethnic/sectarian states in Iraq as key to regional stability. Concerned that even more chaos will follow an anticipated U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, the Turks have encouraged all Iraqi parties to resolve problems through reconciliation and negotiations.

In addition, Turks care about the Iraqi Turkmen (or Turkmen), their ethnic kin, and about building economic ties with Iraq.

Policy Priorities. The high priority that Turkey puts on Iraq's territorial integrity stems from its desire to thwart the emergence of an independent Iraqi Kurdish state that could serve as a model for separatist Turkish Kurds and a staging site for anti-Turkish terror. From 1984 to 1999, Turkey fought a war costing more than 30,000 lives against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), mainly in southeast Turkey. The U.S. State Department lists the Kongra-Gel(KGK)/PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Of an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 PKK members, about 3,000 to 3,500 have taken refuge in the Qandil (or Kandil) Mountains of northern Iraq.¹⁵ Turkish authorities blame the PKK for an upsurge of terrorism in Turkey since 2004, which has provoked public outrage and calls for military action to obliterate the group. The Turkish government has sought to have PKK leaders in northern Iraq arrested, camps that shelter the PKK there closed, and PKK offices in the country shut down permanently.¹⁶ It maintains that if Iraq is not able to stop

¹⁴ Updated by Carol Migdalovitz, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, April 2, 2008.

¹⁵ These figures are from U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2006*, released April 30, 2007, accessible at [<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2006/>]. On June 27, 2007, Turkish Land Forces Commander General İlker Basbug reported that there are between 2,800 and 3,000 PKK terrorists in northern Iraq out of a total group strength of 5,150 to 5,650. "Live Press Briefing on War Against Terrorism," CNN Turk, June 27, 2007, Open Source Center Document GMP 20070627734009. In November 2003, the PKK began to call itself the People's Congress of Kurdistan (Kongra-Gel/KGK). The U.S. State Department uses both names, but the group still is commonly referred to as the PKK.

¹⁶ Turkish officials contend that the PKK usually has opened new offices or offices under
(continued...)

terrorists from using its territory against Turkey, then it is Turkey's right, under international law, to protect itself. While Ankara mainly addressed Baghdad, it held Washington responsible and demanded action. Most Turks view the United States as the authority in Iraq and were dissatisfied with U.S. excuses that U.S. forces in Iraq had other, higher priorities and with U.S. suggestions that means other than force, such as cutting off its finances, might be as effective in combating the PKK.

In the summer of 2006, Turkey built up its military forces on the border to signal its impatience with the continuing PKK presence in northern Iraq. Although observers suggested that an incursion was imminent, one did not occur. The Bush Administration responded to Turkey's message by appointing retired General Joseph Ralston, former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), as Special Envoy for Countering the PKK. His mission was to coordinate with the governments of Turkey and Iraq in order to eliminate the terrorist threat of the PKK operating across the border. The Turkish government initially viewed Ralston's appointment positively as an indication of high level U.S. government interest and named a retired general to be Ralston's counterpart. However, Ralston never achieved concrete results, traveled to the region infrequently, and even suggested that his mission was reconciling Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, not combating the PKK.¹⁷ In October 2007, the State Department confirmed that Ralston had resigned. His appointment succeeded only in preventing Turkey from acting against the PKK for one year, and Turks believe that was his sole purpose.

Another Turkish military buildup was reported in spring 2007. Turkish military action then was limited to increased operations within southeast Turkey and to "hot pursuit" raids and artillery shelling of alleged PKK camp sites in northern Iraq. Later in the year, the Turkish government pursued a diplomatic course. On August 7, at the invitation of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki visited Ankara to sign a memorandum of understanding on countering terrorism, including the PKK. However, Maliki noted that parliament had to approve an agreement and action; he was unable to implement the MOU without the cooperation of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds were noticeably absent from Turkish diplomatic moves because KRG President Massoud Barzani's language regarding Turkey is sometimes inflammatory and he admits that he supports the PKK.¹⁸ Turkish officials assert that they will not deal with the Iraqi Kurdish administration until it acts against terrorism.¹⁹

¹⁶ (...continued)

different front names after closures. Interview with an official of the Turkish Embassy in Washington, DC, December 8, 2006.

¹⁷ "US Strategy to Contain PKK in Turkish Election Year," *Turkish Daily News*, April 5, 2007.

¹⁸ In a March 2007 Al Arabiya TV interview broadcast on April 6, Barzani threatened to interfere in predominantly Kurdish populated southeast Turkey if Turkey intervened in northern Iraq. Such comments may have been in response to Turkish saber rattling.

¹⁹ "Cooperation with Iraqi Kurds Depends on Action against PKK, says (Foreign Minister) (continued...)"

After a spate of deadly PKK attacks in southeast Turkey in September and October, Turkish forces again massed on the border. Fearing that an invasion would destabilize Iraq, President Bush invited Prime Minister Erdogan to the White House on November 5, when the President referred to the PKK as “our common enemy” and promised the Turks “real time” or “actionable” intelligence. In addition, consultations were established among Commander of the Multinational Force in Iraq General David Petraeus, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff General James Cartwright, and Turkish Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Ergin Saygun. As a result, the Turks concluded that the United States was finally taking their concerns seriously.

Turkish forces subsequently conducted targeted air strikes against the PKK and, on February 21, 2008, Turkish special forces launched an incursion into the Iraqi border area of Zap.²⁰ The Turkish military and government were pleased with the success of the operation in which PKK communications, supply depots, and training facilities were degraded seriously and with U.S. assistance.²¹ They were less pleased when President Bush and Defense Secretary Robert Gates called for Turkish troops to withdraw rapidly. The troops withdrew almost immediately after the U.S. statements, provoking a heated controversy in which the nationalist political opposition charged that the military and government had followed orders from Washington and the Chief of the General Staff responded in kind..

On the same day that the offensive was launched, Turkish President Abdullah Gul invited Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to Ankara. Unlike Barzani, Talabani is a Kurd who has described the PKK as a terrorist organization, although he also has called on Turkey to resolve the issue by means other than military. Talabani’s March 7 visit was a first and seen as a mutual effort to ease tensions. The two sides also addressed many bilateral subjects other than the PKK.

The Iraqi Turkomen, ethnic kin of the Turks who reside alongside the Kurds in northern Iraq, are a related concern for Turkey.²² Ankara sympathizes with Turkomen complaints of being displaced and outnumbered by Iraqi Kurds returning to the north. (Saddam Hussein had moved them out of the region.) Although the Turkomen issue appeared less acute after Iraqi national elections in which their turnout was far less

¹⁹ (...continued)
Babacan,” *Turkish Daily News*, March 29, 2008.

²⁰ Chief of Turkish General Staff General Yasar Buyukanit said that Zap was targeted because it is the PKK “nerve center” where actions are planned. “Gen Buyukanit Briefs Media on Turkish Cross-Border Operation,” *Anatolia*, March 3, 2008, Open Source Center Document GMP20080304016007.

²¹ Overview by U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Ross Wilson in Turkey, March 28, 2008.

²² Before the Iraq war, the Turkish government and Turkomen leaders claimed that there were 3 million Turkomen in Iraq out of a total population of about 25 million. Sources suggest, however, that this number is highly inflated and estimate that Turkomen number about 330,000 and that they have assimilated with other Iraqi groups for years. See Colbert C. Held, *Middle East Patterns: Places, Peoples, and Politics*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2000; according to the author, there are about 1.5 million Turkomen in the Middle East, residing in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

than expected, it remains important because both Ankara and the Turkomen are concerned about Kirkuk, a multiethnic city claimed by the Iraqi Kurds situated in the heart of an oil-producing region.²³ Ankara advocated postponing a referendum on the fate of Kirkuk, fearing that it could prove that the city is predominantly Kurdish at the expense of Turkomen residents and that the oil resources on which the city sits could be used to finance an independent Iraqi Kurdish state. Turkish officials argue that Kirkuk and Iraq's natural resources must be equitably shared by all the Iraqi people. Tensions related to Kirkuk have abated somewhat as Iraqi officials have postponed the referendum "for technical reasons."

Economic and Diplomatic Relations. Turks have taken advantage of economic opportunities offered in post-Saddam Iraq. Bilateral trade increased to \$2.8 billion in 2007 and Turkish Trade Minister Kursad Tuzman has repeatedly expressed a desire for a free trade agreement with Iraq.²⁴ Traffic at the single border gate at Habur is notoriously backed up, with trucks waiting days or weeks to cross. The Iraqi Kurds collect tariffs on this border trade. They admit that Turkey is their most important trading partner. Some 15,000 Turks, many Kurds, work in northern Iraq and Turkish companies are drilling for oil in Iraq.²⁵ In addition, the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline, although often sabotaged, is a source of income for both countries and there are plans to increase its capacity. The two countries also plan to cooperate on a pipeline to ship Iraqi natural gas to Europe via Turkey. Playing this economic role is not without cost. About 150 Turkish lives have been lost, including truck drivers, engineers, construction workers, and contractors.

As a sign of Iraq's importance, Turkey has an ambassador in Baghdad, an ambassadorial level Special Representative to Iraq, an ambassador based in Ankara responsible for reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, a consulate in Mosul, and a consulate in Basra that will open within months. The Turkish government kept its embassy in Baghdad open despite a suicide bombing against it in 2003 and attacks on its diplomats.

Potential Responses. A unilateral declaration of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan might trigger a very large scale Turkish military invasion as well as a breach in U.S.-Turkish ties. For now, however, Turkish authorities accept the Iraqi Kurds' claim that independence is not their goal and say that they will respect decisions made by all of the Iraqi people. Some Turks even accept U.S. assurances that Washington does not want an independent "Kurdistan." Ankara has made overtures to other Iraqi ethnic groups, encouraging Sunni Arab participation in elections and establishing good relations with Shiite prime ministers, in an effort to

²³ The electoral slate of the Iraqi Turkmen Front won 3 seats in the January 2005 Iraqi parliamentary election, but only 1 out of 275 total seats in the December 2005 election in which Sunnis also ran.

²⁴ "Turkish Exports to Neighbor Countries Rises by 35.5%," citing Turkish Secretariat for Foreign Trade, *Anatolia*, Open Source Center Document GMP20080324737003, March 24, 2008.

²⁵ Director General of the Ministry of Trade in Irbil Aziz Ibrahim Abdo quoted in Nicholas Birch, "Kurds Rely on Turkey for Workers, Goods," [<http://www.washingtontimes.com>], July 2, 2007.

further Iraqi unity and bilateral relations. Turkey has improved ties with Iran and Syria and consults them regularly about Iraq. Kurdish and other media reports have alleged that Turkish military forces have operated with Iranians against the PKK and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), a related Iranian Kurdish group, in northern Iraq. Turkish officials insist that multilateral contact groups include all of Iraq's neighbors, meaning Syria and Iran, and meetings of neighbors have included Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Arab League.

Turkish officials contend that the public attitudes toward the United States, which had deteriorated due to the PKK issue, have been changing in a positive direction since President Bush's November 5 meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan and subsequent U.S. intelligence support for Turkish military operations against the PKK in northern Iraq. Some claim that views of the United States have risen from a low 9% favorability rating to about 30%, but no polls are known to have confirmed that conclusion yet.²⁶

Saudi Arabia²⁷

Perspectives and Interests. Saudi Arabia's relationship with Iraq has been tense historically, although periods of Saudi-Iraqi cooperation have occurred when supported by convergent interests, most notably during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Saudi Arabia publicly opposed the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, but provided logistical support to U.S. forces,²⁸ and Saudi officials have called on U.S. forces not to leave Iraq on an "uninvited" basis.²⁹ Saudi Arabia's principle interests with regard to the conflict in Iraq are — first, to prevent instability and conflict in Iraq from threatening Saudi Arabia's internal security and stability; second, to prevent the repression of Iraq's Sunnis by newly dominant Shiites; and, third, to limit the regional influence of a potentially hostile Iran.³⁰ Saudi Arabia's longer term interests include ensuring that the revival of Iraq's oil industry does not threaten

²⁶ The Pew Global Attitudes Project survey, released on June 27, 2007, indicated that 83% of Turks had unfavorable views of the United States, while only 9% held favorable views. See [<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=256>]. On February 28, 2008, Justice and Development Party (AKP) Deputy Leader and Member of Parliament Egemen Bagis told attendees of a Center for Strategic and International Studies/International Republican Institute event that favorability ratings had risen to the 30's.

²⁷ Prepared by Christopher M. Blanchard, Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs.

²⁸ See CRS Report RL33533 for a full discussion of Saudi support for U.S. combat efforts. See also "U.S. And Saudis Agree On Cooperation," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2003; and John Solomon, "Saudis had wider role in war," *Associated Press*, April 26, 2004.

²⁹ In October 2006, and repeatedly thereafter, then-Saudi Ambassador to the United States Prince Turki al Faisal argued that, "The kingdom's position has always been that since the United States came into Iraq uninvited, they shouldn't leave uninvited." Arshad Mohammed, "Saudi envoy warns US against abrupt Iraq withdrawal," *Reuters*, October 30, 2006.

³⁰ For the Saudi cabinet's statement of its key principles for Iraq, see *Saudi Press Agency* (Riyadh), "King Abdullah Chairs Cabinet's Session," November 20, 2006.

Saudi preeminence and preferences in global energy markets and that Iraq does not re-emerge as a strategic military threat to the Arab Gulf states.

Policy Priorities. The Saudi Arabian government has refrained from overt political or military intervention in Iraq since 2003, in spite of the threat that instability in Iraq has posed to Saudi Arabia's national security. To date, Saudi policy initiatives have sought to meet the humanitarian needs of Iraqis displaced by ongoing violence; to promote political and religious reconciliation among Iraqis by hosting and participating in various regional conferences; and, to take preventive security measures to limit the spread of violence into Saudi Arabia. Some analysts believe that Saudi Arabia has not fulfilled pledges of aid to Iraq because it does not want to support an Iraqi government that many Saudis believe has a Shiite sectarian agenda. Other observers also speculate that the Saudi government may be offering financial support to Sunni Arab individuals and groups in Iraq, including tribal leaders and others associated with the so called "awakening" movement.

The willingness of influential Saudi clerics, wealthy Saudi individuals, and young Saudi citizens to offer rhetorical,³¹ financial,³² or personal support to various combatants in Iraq remains a challenge. In particular, the phenomenon of Saudis traveling to Iraq to fight alongside other foreign fighters has created a long term security risk for both countries: Saudi veterans of similar conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and other regions constituted the hard core of the Al Qaeda-affiliated group responsible for the series of successful and attempted terrorist attacks that occurred in the kingdom from late 2002 through early 2006. Official Saudi clerics, including Grand Mufti Shaykh Abd al Aziz bin Abdallah Al Shaykh, have released fatwas stating that travel to Iraq for the purpose of participating in violent activity is illegitimate and not religiously sanctioned.³³

Estimates of the number of Saudis who have traveled to Iraq to fight remain imprecise and difficult to verify. In November 2006, a U.S. military spokesman stated that of the approximately 1,100 foreign fighters killed or captured in Iraq over the past year, 12% were Saudi nationals.³⁴ One July 2007 press report cited unnamed

³¹ "Saudi Clerics Appeal Iraqi Islamic Insurgency Factions to Unite Against 'Enemy,'" Open Source Center (OSC) Document GMP20070411860009, April 11, 2007; "Saudi Cleric Al Jibrin Statement Denounces Shiites' Acts Against Sunnis in Iraq," OSC Document GMP20070122836001, January 20, 2007; "Saudi Arabian Clerics Issue Statement Backing Iraq's Sunni Muslims," OSC Document GMP20061211837002, December 10, 2006.

³² Saudi officials generally deny that Saudi citizens provide financial support for Iraqi combatants, and little specific information is publicly available to corroborate claims to the contrary. Nevertheless, a number of press reports citing unnamed U.S. officials allege that such support exists and the Iraq Study Group report (p. 25) stated that, "funding for the Sunni insurgency comes from private individuals within Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States."

³³ "Iraqi Newspaper Reports on Saudi Fatwas Forbidding Travel to Fight in Iraq," OSC Document GMP20070610621002, June 3, 2007.

³⁴ In a February 13, 2006, interview, Prince Turki al Faisal said that as of mid-2005 approximately 10% of captured foreign fighters held in Iraq were Saudis. See Mark Huband and William Wallis, "Saudi Arabia Fears Attacks from Insurgents Battle-hardened in Iraq," (continued...)

U.S. military and intelligence officials as claiming that 30 to 40 Saudis were traveling to Iraq to fight each month and that the majority of foreign suicide bombers in Iraq were Saudis.³⁵ To help prevent the return of Saudi volunteers or the flow of other combatants and materiel from Iraq into Saudi Arabia, Saudi officials have strengthened their border control efforts and are planning to implement a significant border security infrastructure improvement program.³⁶ In August 2007, Prince Saud al Faisal dismissed reports that Saudis were traveling to Iraq as combatants in disproportionate numbers and argued that volume of “the traffic of terrorists” from Iraq to Saudi Arabia was greater than the volume flowing in the other direction.³⁷ Recent U.S. military assessments suggest that Saudi efforts to more carefully control exit visas has contributed to a decline in the number of Saudi fighters reaching Iraq.

Saudi official and public views of Iraq also reflect concern about the empowerment of Iraq’s Shiite Arab population and the growth of Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf region and broader Middle East. During a well publicized speech in New York in September 2005, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal commented that “we are handing the whole country [Iraq] over to Iran without reason,” and warned of increased Sunni-Shiite violence.³⁸ The historically tense relationship between Saudi Arabia’s Sunni Arab majority and Shiite Arab minority further compounds the situation: some Saudi Shiites have welcomed the empowerment of Iraq’s Shiite Arabs and recognize Iraq-based Shiite clerics as their religious leaders. In turn, some conservative Sunni Saudis regard the Shiite minority as religiously aberrant and potentially politically disloyal.³⁹

³⁴ (...continued)

Financial Times (London), December 20, 2004; “U.S. Faults Saudi Efforts on Terrorism,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 2006; and, Remarks by Major General William Caldwell, Spokesman, Multinational Force-Iraq, Defense Department News Briefing, November 20, 2006.

³⁵ Helene Cooper, “U.S. Officials Voice Frustrations With Saudis, Citing Role in Iraq,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2007.

³⁶ According to press reports, Saudi Arabia is considering plans to construct a high-tech system of fences and detection systems along its entire 900 kilometer border with Iraq, but some Saudi officials have stated that the structures will be targeted to certain key areas rather than stretching along the entire border. The Saudi government claims to have spent \$1.8 billion on strengthening the border with Iraq since 2004. See P.K. Abdul Ghafour, “Work on Iraq Border Fence Starts in 2007,” *Arab News*, November 15, 2006; and Raid Qusti, “Kingdom Denies Plans to Build Fence on Border With Iraq,” *Arab News*, November 20, 2006.

³⁷ Transcript of Press Availability with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faysal, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, August 1, 2007.

³⁸ *Reuters*, “Saudi Says U.S. Policy Handing Iraq over to Iran,” September 20, 2005.

³⁹ See International Crisis Group, *The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia*, Middle East Report No. 45, September 19, 2005; and John Solomon, “Saudi Arabia’s Shiites and their Effect on the Kingdom’s Stability,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 4, Issue 15, July 27, 2006.

Economic and Diplomatic Relations. Sectarian and strategic anxieties complicate Saudi efforts to engage the Shiite-led Iraqi government, to establish strong trade links, and to discourage and prevent Saudi clerics and individuals from supporting Sunni Arab combatants in Iraq. Saudi leaders maintain regular contact with prominent Iraqi government officials, clerics, and political figures. A Saudi Foreign Ministry delegation visited Iraq in August 2007 to explore the possibility of reopening an embassy in Baghdad, and in January 2008, Prince Saud al Faisal announced that an ambassador had been chosen and that Saudi Arabia hoped to open an embassy in Baghdad “in the next few months.”⁴⁰ The Saudi government has pledged \$500 million from the Saudi Development Fund to sponsor Iraqi government-requested development projects, along with \$500 million to finance potential bilateral trade and close to \$90 million in humanitarian relief assistance.⁴¹ However, since 2003, trade between Iraq and Saudi Arabia has remained very limited. Saudi and Iraqi security services have increased their cooperation over the last year, and Iraqi National Security Adviser Muwaffaq Al Rubai said in a March 2008 press interview that, “we believe now that Saudi-Iraqi coordination is at its best and its highest levels.”⁴²

Debt forgiveness remains a key outstanding issue in Iraqi-Saudi relations. As of January 2004, Iraq reportedly owed the Saudi government \$9 billion for debt incurred under the Saddam Hussein regime (mostly during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s). Private Saudi firms and banks hold about \$19 billion in additional Iraqi debt.⁴³ Questions have been raised about whether Iraq’s debt to Saudi Arabia should be subject to interest payments, and both parties have agreed to discuss the matter further. U.S. officials have encouraged Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to forgive Iraq’s outstanding debt to support Iraqi reconstruction and economic recovery efforts, and the Iraq Study Group report speculated that Saudi Arabia could agree to cancel the outstanding debt as part of a regional effort to support and stabilize Iraq.⁴⁴

Potential Responses. The Saudi Arabian government’s restraint from overt involvement in the Iraq conflict stands in contrast to reported patterns of private Saudi support for anti-coalition and anti-Iraqi government activity. In the face of continued Sunni Arab-led insurgency in Iraq, the Saudi regime is likely to continue

⁴⁰ Prince Saud al Faisal quoted in “U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Remarks With Saudi Arabia Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal,” State Department Press Releases and Documents, January 15, 2008.

⁴¹ Statement of Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal to United Nations meeting on Iraq, September 18, 2006. Available at [<http://www.mofa.gov.sa/Detail.asp?InNewsItemID=55259>].

⁴² Iraq’s Al-Rubay’i on Handling Saudi Detainees to Riyadh, “Talks With Saudi FM,” Al Sharq al-Awsat (London), OSC Document GMP20080327825008, March 27, 2008.

⁴³ For more information, see CRS Report RL33376, *Iraq’s Debt Relief: Procedure and Potential Implications for International Debt Relief*, by Martin A. Weiss; and Tom Everett-Heath, “Opposing Views of the Kingdom to Come,” *Middle East Economic Digest*, January 23-29, 2004, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Mariam Karouny and Alister Bull, “Iraq Finance Minister Says Still no Deal on Gulf Debt,” *Reuters*, August 1, 2006; and Iraq Study Group Report, p. 35.

to refrain from providing direct support for insurgent forces in order to avoid confrontation with the United States and out of fear that the collapse of Iraq's government could strengthen Iraq-based transnational terrorist elements hostile to the Al Saud family. However, the escalation of sectarian violence in Iraq since February 2006 and more assertive Iranian foreign policies appeared to undermine domestic support for a policy of restraint among Saudis. From late 2006 through mid-2007, a number of influential figures and religious scholars in Saudi Arabia called for their government and fellow citizens to provide direct political and security assistance to Iraq's Sunni Arab community and to confront what they perceived as Iranian-led Shiite ascendancy in the region.⁴⁵

In December 2006, leading cleric Salman al Awdah called "honest resistance [in Iraq] ... one of the legitimate types of *jihad*," and an October 2006 petition signed by 38 prominent religious figures called on Sunnis everywhere to oppose a joint "crusader [U.S.], Safavid [Iranian] and Rafidi [Shiite] scheme" to target Iraq's Sunni Arab population.⁴⁶ Anti-Shiite sectarian rhetoric has been a consistent feature of statements on Iraq from other Saudi clerics, including Abdallah bin Jibrin, Abd al Rahman al Barak, Nasser al Omar, and Safar al Hawali.⁴⁷ Confrontation with these religious figures over their remarks and activities poses political challenges for the Saudi government, since some of them, such as Al Awdah and Al Hawali, have supported government efforts to de-legitimize terrorism inside the kingdom and have sponsored or participated in efforts to religiously re-educate former Saudi combatants.

Prince Saud al Faisal has dismissed calls for direct involvement and has stated, that "since the start of the crisis in Iraq ... the Kingdom has said it will stand at an equal distance from all Iraqi groups and does not describe itself as the guardian of any group or sect."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Saudi officials have delayed a full embrace of the current Iraqi government and reportedly remain frustrated with what they perceive to be Prime Minister Al Maliki's anti-Sunni sectarian policy approach and his administration's unduly close relationship with Iran.

Reconciliation and long term stability in Iraq could ease Saudi fears of creeping instability, but could also create new challenges. Saudi Arabia's immediate concern in a post-conflict environment would be the reintegration or elimination of returning Saudi militants. The outcome of reconciliation or conflict in Iraq and the leadership

⁴⁵ Nawaf Obaid, "Stepping Into Iraq: Saudi Arabia Will Protect Sunnis if the U.S. Leaves," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2006.

⁴⁶ Al Awdah's comments were made at the "Conference for Supporting the Iraqi People" in Ankara, Turkey. OSC Document GMP20061211837002, December 10, 2006.

⁴⁷ Both clerics signed the October 2006 statement. Al Awdah did not: he has been outspoken in his criticism of Iranian intervention in Iraq, but has spoken out against Sunni-Shiite conflict on his website: [<http://www.islamtoday.net/>]. See "Saudi Shaykh Al-Awdah Warns of Sectarian War in Iraq, Holds US Responsible," OSC Document GMP20061107866002, November 5, 2006.

⁴⁸ *Arab News* (Jeddah), "Kingdom Won't Take Sides in Iraq, Says Saud," December 20, 2006; and Robin Wright, "Royal Intrigue, Unpaid Bills Preceded Saudi Ambassador's Exit," *Washington Post*, December 23, 2006.

and character of Iraq's government will determine whether Saudi fears about the empowerment of Shiite Arabs and the growth of Iranian influence persist or diminish. Future Iraqi choices in key areas such as energy and military policy will have important implications for Iraqi-Saudi relations over the long term.⁴⁹

Syria⁵⁰

Perspectives and Interests. The Syrian regime desires a weak and divided Iraqi state on its eastern border, though it fears a total Iraqi central government collapse and full-blown Iraqi civil war due to the potential for ethnic and sectarian violence to spill over into Syria. Syria itself is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society with a sizeable Kurdish minority. President Asad's regime is controlled by a minority Alawite sect in a country with a reported 70% Sunni Muslim majority. In order to reinforce his regime's rule, Syrian President Bashar al Asad has repeatedly pointed to the violence and instability in Iraq as a warning to those dissidents and opposition figures in Syria seeking political reform. Some experts believe that Asad's strategy has succeeded, as the central government has arrested dozens of activists and opposition figures in recent years. Syrian authorities often claim that many ordinary Syrians prefer the status quo to Iraq's experiment with U.S.-initiated democratic reform. While this may be true to a limited extent, ultimately, Syria views the situation in Iraq through the prism of its own domestic politics, as its rulers value regime survival above all else.

Syria opposed the U.S. decision to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom which overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein and, since then, has sought to make life difficult for U.S. forces in Iraq. Major U.S. concerns with regard to Syria include the alleged presence in Syria of Baathist ex-regime officials and the continuing use of Syria as a transit point for foreign fighters.⁵¹ Syria claims that it cannot totally control its porous 375-mile border with Iraq, and that it has taken steps to improve its security measures.

However, like many of Iraq's neighbors, Syria may be apprehensive over the possible total withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Thus, Syria has sought to maintain relationships with many different Iraqi factions and has engaged Prime Minister Maliki's government on a variety of issues, including energy cooperation, water, and border security. In November 2006, Syria reestablished diplomatic

⁴⁹ With regard to oil policy, there is a possibility, in the words of one analyst, that over the long term, "the Saudi interest in moderate prices and preserving market share will run afoul of the Iraqi need for maximum production at high prices to fund national reconstruction." See Joseph McMillan, *Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion, and an Enduring Rivalry*, USIP, Special Report No. 157, January 2006, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Prepared by Jeremy M. Sharp, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

⁵¹ According to the U.S. Department of Defense Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq report for March 2008, "Terrorists and foreign fighters continue to find safe haven, border transit opportunities and logistical support in Syria, despite increasing Syrian counterterrorism efforts." Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, Report to Congress in accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9010, P. L. 109-289), March 7, 2008, p. 6.

relations with Iraq for the first time since the early 1980s.⁵² In August 2007, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki paid his first visit to Syria to discuss security issues, the reactivation of commercial agreements that pre-date the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the possible reopening of an oil pipeline between the two countries. Since then, Iraqi officials have praised Syrian security efforts along the border.⁵³ Syria and Iraq also have reopened a major border crossing and agreed to reactivate a major oil pipeline.

Policy Priorities. The Syrian regime sees Iraq as an important neighboring state with which it shares many affinities but which it regards as a potential threat and a rival for leadership in the Arab world. Syria's Alawite leadership does not necessarily have a favorite among Iraq's Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds, but is anxious that Iraq's leadership be amenable to Syrian regional goals. Also, given Syria's long-standing reliance on Iran for regional political support, Syrian leaders are likely to accept and support a degree of Iranian influence over the already Shiite dominated Iraqi government, especially given parallel Syrian and Iranian goals in Lebanon. By the same token, Syria is inclined to support the goals of the radical Lebanese Shiite fundamentalist organization Hezbollah not only in Lebanon but in Iraq as well.

Perhaps as an indication of its growing proximity to Iran, Syrian officials openly criticized Saudi Arabia, a regional rival to Iran, when Syrian Vice-President Farouq al Shara remarked in August 2007 that Saudi Arabia's decision not to attend a recent regional conference on Iraqi security hosted by Syria, was "regrettable." In response, Saudi Arabia claimed that Shara'a's statements "contained numerous lies" and were aimed at "stoking disorder in the region." Some analysts have interpreted this rare public inter-Arab dispute as Syrian "grandstanding," in which the government distances itself from Iraq's other Arab neighbors. Syria's policy toward Iraq differs from that of its other Sunni Arab neighbors, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. While all three countries maintain close ties to Iraq's Sunni Arab community, Syria's strategic relationship with Iran forces it to balance regional Sunni-Shiite tensions.

Economic and Diplomatic Relations. Economic relations between Syria and Iraq are built on a variety of largely unofficial contacts, including illicit trade, smuggling, and influx of refugees. A partial rapprochement between the two countries began in the late 1990s with the resumption of oil shipments on the order of 200,000 barrels per day from Iraq to Syria; these shipments were halted by allied coalition forces after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, but commercial ties continued in other sectors, particularly through traditional barter and

⁵² For many years, Syria and Iraq had an uneven and often troubled relationship, stemming from political disputes, border tensions, demographic differences, and personal animosity between the two countries' late leaders: Syrian President Hafiz al Asad and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Moreover, the two countries were governed by rival wings of the pan-Arab Baath Party. In the late 1990s bilateral relations improved markedly, primarily in the economic sphere.

⁵³ "There is better security cooperation on the part of Syria to help the Iraqi government to police the (Syria-Iraqi) border and to prevent the movement of fighters.... We appreciate the measures taken by Syria." Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari as quoted in *Agence France Presse*, "Iraq Praises Syrian Cooperation In Boosting Security," December 12, 2007.

low level trade between tribal groups straddling the Syrian-Iraqi border. In 2005, Iraq's imports from Syria were worth \$2.987 billion and Iraq's exports to Syria were worth \$500 million.⁵⁴

In a related vein, the large-scale disruption of the Iraqi economy and mounting security threats following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein have created a new dimension to Syrian-Iraqi economic relations in the form of a mass movement of Iraqi refugees seeking to escape privation and insecurity, particularly to Syria and Jordan. Syrian officials reportedly estimate that between 1.2 and 1.5 million Iraqi refugees have settled at least temporarily in the Damascus suburbs, changing the character of entire neighborhoods and creating strains on the Syrian domestic economy in the form of rising rents, housing demands, and impending water and electricity shortages. The sex trade in Syria has grown, as many Iraqi women work as prostitutes in Syria. The Iraqi refugee population in Syria has more female-headed households in which mothers lack personal savings and cannot work legally. Syrian authorities maintained an open door policy regarding new arrivals until October 2007, and are demanding additional assistance from the international community.

Potential Responses. The development of future Syrian policy toward Iraq depends on a number of complex variables, including the stability and orientation of the Syrian regime itself and the course of events in Iraq. Syrian goals in Iraq are in some ways obscure, and there are significant differences among outside observers over what the present Syrian regime is seeking and what type of outcome a future Syrian regime might want to see. Some commentators believe that neither Syria nor Iran want to see Iraq fragment along the lines of Lebanon during its 15-year civil war, with Sunnis and Shiites locked in continued and apparently open-ended fighting. Others counter that Syria seems inclined to continue fomenting strife in Iraq in an effort to tie down U.S. resources, while gaining a free hand to recoup ground it lost in Lebanon over the past two years.⁵⁵ However, Syria's ability to affect the balance of power in the region is constrained by its limited military capabilities, which are adequate to maintain internal security but suffer from poor training and obsolescent equipment. There is also a possibility that significant differences over Iraq exist within the Syrian policy-making community and that the young and relatively inexperienced Syrian president, Dr. Bashar al Asad, is vacillating among various policy options, giving the impression of a contradictory approach to Syria's Iraq policy. A drastic change in the regime governing Syria could have significant effects on Syria's view of Iraq and the policies it might adopt toward the Iraqi leadership.

As noted above, there are divergent views among U.S. commentators regarding whether Syria would best be served by disorder or stability in Iraq. Should Iraq slide into full-fledged civil war, however, Syria would face intricate decisions. Foremost among these would be whether to support the Sunni-led insurgency or to support more extremist elements of the Shiite militia, particularly strongly pro-Iranian groups and militants such as the hard line Shiite leader Muqtada al Sadr. An attempt by

⁵⁴ International Monetary Fund, Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, 2006.

⁵⁵ For further discussion, see Evan Thomas, "So Now What, Mr. President," *Newsweek*, December 11, 2006, pp. 36-37.

Syria to cultivate both Sunnis and Shiites would be difficult and could jeopardize the preeminent position of President Bashar al Asad's Alawite sect within Syria.

Should Iraq stabilize, an Iraqi regime that appeared to be making progress toward containing the insurgency and establishing a measure of control over much of Iraq would confront Syria with its most intricate challenge of all. On one hand, a move toward stability in Iraq could deprive the Syrian regime of an important lever in dealing with the United States on Lebanon and other issues; however, given President Asad's periodic espousal of stability in Iraq it would be difficult for him to appear to reject this goal. Under any or all of these scenarios, Recommendations 9 and 12 of the Iraq Study Group report might be relevant. The two recommendations call, variously, for engagement with Syria to enlist its support for constructive policies in Iraq and the region, to encourage Syria to control its border with Iraq, to establish hot lines between Syria and Iraq, and to increase bilateral political and economic cooperation. Critics of the Iraq Study Group recommendations argue that the concessions necessary to convince Syria to adopt a more cooperative strategy remain undefined and could prove too costly in light of other U.S. interests.

Jordan⁵⁶

Perspectives and Interests. Jordan's relations with Iraq during the Saddam Hussein era were strong. In 2003, Jordan publicly opposed military action against Iraq, but it informally and quietly provided logistical support to the U.S.-led campaign to oust Saddam Hussein. Since 2003, Jordanians have repeatedly criticized what they perceive to be the political marginalization of Iraq's Sunni Arab population. Unlike Iraq's other neighbors, Jordan has a limited ability to intervene in Iraq's affairs at present, and, since 2003, Jordanian leaders have been far more concerned with Iraq's influence on the kingdom's own politics, trade, and internal security. The Jordanian government's principal interests with regard to Iraq include managing Jordanian Islamist opposition movements in light of the empowerment of Islamist groups in Iraq; preventing the creation of safe-havens for terrorists in western Iraq that could threaten Jordan's internal security; and limiting the growth of Iran's regional influence as a means of preventing the development of serious strategic threat to Jordan.

Looking forward, Jordan would prefer the emergence of a stable Iraq under Sunni Arab control. As this scenario appears unlikely given current circumstances, Jordan seems committed both to supporting the continued presence of U.S. troops in Iraq and the fledgling Iraqi government so long as the latter makes an effort to reintegrate Sunni Arab Iraqis into the military and government and does not become a vehicle for destabilizing Iranian initiatives. Over the long term, the Jordanian government has serious concerns regarding Iraq's future and the potential deleterious consequences that may arise from wider sectarian warfare within Iraq.

Policy Priorities. Although Jordan always has been dependent on foreign patrons, King Abdullah has brought Jordanian policy closer to that of the United States since his ascension to the throne in 1999 than at any previous point in the

⁵⁶ Prepared by Jeremy M. Sharp, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

kingdom's history. Since mid-2003, Jordan has made modest contributions to Iraq's stability that have been widely interpreted as symbolic attempts to cooperate with U.S. rebuilding efforts and to minimize the negative consequences for Jordan of instability in Iraq. The centerpiece of Jordan's stabilization efforts remains the Jordan International Police Training Center (JIPTC) located outside of the capital city of Amman, which has prepared more than 30,000 Iraqi cadets since 2003 with the support of approximately \$100 million in annual U.S. funding. According to allied coalition officials, Jordan also has donated military and police equipment to support the new Iraqi security forces.⁵⁷

While the pursuit of these policies has brought tangible benefits to Jordan, such as increased U.S. trade and foreign assistance, Jordan's close ties to the United States make it an easy target for the king's opponents, especially Jordanian Islamists who are largely opposed to U.S. policy in the region. Some Jordanians fear that, like the 2006 Hamas victory in Palestinian Authority elections, the political participation of Islamist parties in Iraq is accelerating a growing pattern of Islamist political ascendancy in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Although many believe that Arab regimes deliberately stoke Western fears of a growing Islamist radicalism to justify the repression of domestic opposition, the potential for Jordanian groups to emulate Iraqi Islamists cannot be wholly dismissed and is viewed with great consternation by Jordan's royal family and its allies.

Potential threats from transnational terrorism and increased Iranian influence also dominate Jordan's Iraq policy agenda. Despite the killing of Jordanian terrorist mastermind Abu Musab al Zarqawi in June 2006 by U.S. and Iraqi forces (reportedly with assistance from Jordanian intelligence), the threat of Al Qaeda-affiliated or inspired terrorists using Iraq's predominately Sunni Al Anbar Province as a launching pad to destabilize Jordan remains high. On November 9, 2005, near simultaneous explosions at three Western-owned hotels in Amman killed 58 persons and seriously wounded approximately 100 others. Al Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility for the attacks. In December 2006, Jordan and Iraq signed an agreement to coordinate intelligence on Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Overall, Jordanian Islamists have stressed their loyalty to the monarchy in the face of the terrorist threat, although four Islamist parliamentarians were arrested in the summer of 2006 for praising Al Zarqawi by calling him a "martyr."

Jordan continues to be both a source of foreign fighters joining the Sunni insurgency and a target of Al Qaeda-inspired terrorist groups. The industrial town of Zarqa, several miles northeast of Amman, has been well documented as a source of Sunni militancy, as dozens of its young men have traveled to Iraq to die as suicide bombers. According to one Islamist community leader in Zarqa, "Most of the young people here in Zarqa are very religious.... And when they see the news and what is going on in the Islamic countries, they themselves feel that they have to go to fight

⁵⁷ Jordanian supplied equipment reportedly includes 250 Ukrainian-built BTR-94 armored personnel carriers (APCs), 100 British Spartan APCs, and U.S. M113A1 APCs, along with 2 C-130B Hercules transport aircraft and 16 UH-1H utility helicopters.

jihad. Today, you don't need anyone to tell the young men that they should go to jihad. They themselves want to be martyrs.”⁵⁸

In 2004, King Abdullah warned that Iran was seeking to create “a Shiite crescent” in the Middle East, which alarms not only Jordan, but its oil-rich Sunni-led Gulf allies upon whom it relies for political and financial support. Iran’s ability to further inflame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the use of radical proxy groups, such as the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah organization and the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups, could have potentially adverse effects on Jordan’s security, a fact also recognized by Jordan’s Sunni Islamists.⁵⁹

Economic and Diplomatic Relations. International efforts to rebuild Iraq have reverberated throughout various sectors of Jordan’s economy. Since 2003, many observers have dubbed Jordan as the “gateway to Iraq,” as thousands of contractors, businessmen, and foreign officials have used Jordan as a base for their Iraq operations.⁶⁰ Iraqi-Jordanian trade has yet to return to pre-2003 levels, but has recovered since 2003, reaching an estimated \$834 million in total trade in 2005.⁶¹ Iraq has resumed daily shipments of 40,000 barrels of oil to Jordan as part of an agreement, and Jordanian and Iraqi officials continue to discuss the possibility of constructing an oil pipeline from Haditha to the Jordanian port of Aqaba.⁶²

Jordan hosts approximately 500,000 Iraqi refugees and provides social services that Jordanian officials estimate have cost \$1.6 billion.⁶³ For a small, poor country such as Jordan, this population influx is creating profound changes in Jordan’s economy and society. Jordan’s banking and real estate sectors are soaring with the increased demand for housing and the influx of capital from middle class expatriate

⁵⁸ “In Jihadist Haven, a Goal: To Kill and Die in Iraq,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2007.

⁵⁹ In one recent press release, Hamzah Mansur, a leader of Jordan’s main Islamist party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), warned Iran to cease provoking sectarianism in Iraq, stating, “If Iran’s involvement in the bloodshed in Iraq is ascertained, then the Islamic movements will find themselves forced to reconsider their stand on Iran since its involvement in sectarian sedition would lead to serious consequences across the Islamic world.” See, “Jordan: IAF Calls on Iranian President To End Sectarian Sedition in Iraq,” *Al Arab Al Yawm*, OSC Document GMP20061208641001, December 8, 2006.

⁶⁰ See Scott Lasensky, *Jordan and Iraq: Between Cooperation and Crisis*, USIP, Special Report No. 178, November 2006.

⁶¹ Total trade is equal to exports plus imports. Iraq imports from Jordan during 2005 totaled \$809 million, whereas Iraq exports totaled \$25 million. In 2002, Iraq’s exports to Jordan were worth \$684 million and imports from Jordan were worth \$664 million. Source: International Monetary Fund, Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, 2006.

⁶² Suhail Ahmed, “Iraqi finance minister says Iraq and Jordan strengthen their oil deal,” *Associated Press*, February 4, 2008.

⁶³ Petra News Agency (Jordan), “Jordan’s Speech at Countries Hosting Iraqis Conference,” March 18, 2008; and Suhail Ahmed, “Norwegian pollster puts Iraqi refugees in Jordan at up to 500,000,” *Associated Press*, November 13, 2007.

Iraqis. On the other hand, inflation is rapidly rising,⁶⁴ and there have been anecdotal reports of increased tension between Jordanian citizens and Iraqi refugees due to the strains placed on social services by a near 20% increase in the country's population in a short period of time.⁶⁵

Iraqi refugees in Jordan face difficult circumstances. Many cannot obtain residency permits which would allow them to work legally. Anecdotal reports suggest many families are living off dwindling personal savings, and the Jordanian border authorities have begun restricting entry of refugees into Jordan. In August 2007, the Jordanian government, perhaps under international pressure, announced that Iraqi children without residency could attend Jordanian public schools, a right not extended to any other foreigners. At this time, it is unclear whether displaced Iraqis will become a permanent fixture in Jordan or will return to Iraq if, or when, violence subsides. According to a U.S. State Department-conducted survey of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, "Nearly all [Iraqi] participants say they would return to Iraq if the security situation alone improved — even with continued problems in basic services or lack of job opportunities."⁶⁶ Other Iraqis may be using Jordan as a gateway for obtaining residency/asylum in the West.

In August 2006, Jordanian diplomat Ahmed al Lozi became the first accredited Arab ambassador to serve in Iraq since the 2003 U.S. invasion. Iraq reciprocated by announcing shortly thereafter its intention to re-establish direct oil shipments to oil-deprived Jordan at preferential market prices.⁶⁷ Some of Iraq's new Shiite leaders view with suspicion Jordan's former close ties to the Saddam Hussein regime and continuing strong relations with Iraq's Sunni Arabs. Frictions between Jordan and Iraq continue over the future status of Saddam Hussein's relatives and former Baath Party officials residing in Jordan as guests of the government.⁶⁸ Jordan has hosted

⁶⁴ One foreign official noted that, "The impression of many Jordanians is that the Iraqis here are all wealthy ... and that they are the cause of the inflation and the rising cost of prices in Jordan." See "Iraqi Refugees Spill into Jordan, Driving Up Prices," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 29, 2006.

⁶⁵ One report noted that Iraqi Shiite refugees in Jordan feel they are being unfairly targeted by police out of fear that Iraqi Shiite militias are trying to organize in Jordan. See, "Uneasy Havens Await Those Who Flee Iraq," *New York Times*, December 8, 2006.

⁶⁶ "Iraqi Refugees in Jordan Await Stability before Returning," Office of Research, Opinion Analysis, U.S. Department of State, February 28, 2007.

⁶⁷ Reportedly, Jordan will receive approximately 10,000-30,000 barrels of oil per day (roughly 10%-30% of their daily consumption) from Iraq, at a price of \$10 per barrel. This quantity would increase to 50,000 barrels at a later stage, based on the memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries.

⁶⁸ King Abdullah granted Saddam's eldest daughter, Raghdad, and her sister, Rana, asylum on humanitarian grounds after the start of U.S. military operations in 2003. The Iraqi government has placed Raghdad on a list of its 41 most wanted persons and demanded that Raghdad be extradited to Iraq to stand trial. Iraqi officials have alleged that members of Saddam Hussein's family and inner circle currently in Jordan are providing financial and media support to the insurgency in Iraq in an effort to revitalize the Baath Party in Iraq. In August 2007, Interpol issued a wanted notice against Raghdad Hussein at the reported
(continued...)

and facilitated meetings between U.S. officials and Iraqi leaders aimed at resolving these and other political disputes, including the highly publicized summit in Amman between President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki in December 2006. Recent reports also suggest that Jordan has facilitated meetings between members of the Sunni Arab-led insurgency and U.S. representatives at the Iraqi Embassy in Amman.⁶⁹

Potential Responses. As a country with a limited ability to project political or military power in Iraq, it is doubtful that Jordan alone could bring about a compromise solution to Iraq's sectarian violence and insurgency. Nevertheless, should the Administration heed the main recommendations of the Iraq Study Group report and pursue an all out push for Iraqi national reconciliation, Jordan could be useful in serving as one of several symbolic bridges to Iraq's Sunni community. The ISG report argues that Jordan has the professional capability to train and equip Iraqi military and security forces, and Iraqi-Jordanian tribal ties may facilitate this process should more Sunni Iraqis join Iraq's army.

Under the more grave scenario of a nationwide civil war that draws Iraq's neighbors into the ongoing conflict, it is extremely unlikely that the Jordanian government would provide support to Sunni militias with possible ties to Al Qaeda. On the other hand, it is plausible that Jordan, along with neighboring Saudi Arabia and other states, could provide financing and materiel support to other elements of Iraq's Sunni Arab population, including tribally-led and -organized groups or, more controversially, to Iraqis formerly associated with the military, intelligence, or security services of the Saddam Hussein regime. In the event of continuing or widened conflict in Iraq, Jordan also could move to seal its border with Iraq or establish a security zone inside western Iraq in order to insulate itself from any spillover of violence or destabilizing refugee flows.

Other Regional Governments

The Gulf States⁷⁰

Prior to the U.S. intervention in Iraq, the Sunni Arab-led governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council had predicted that removing the Saddam Hussein regime

⁶⁸ (...continued)

request of the Iraqi government. According to government a Jordanian government spokesperson, "Handing over Mrs Raghad Saddam Hussein has not been raised."

⁶⁹ According to Saad al Hayani, Iraq's Ambassador to Jordan, "Two large meetings happened here in the embassy.... They included leaders from the last government, the Baathists, and the old Army. They were offered the opportunity to participate in the political situation if their hands were clean. The meetings were successful and necessary and beneficial." See "Quiet U.S. Bid to Talk to Iraqi Insurgents," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 7, 2006.

⁷⁰ Prepared by Christopher M. Blanchard, Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs, and Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

would not necessarily produce stability in Iraq, and several were reluctant to support U.S. military operations. For the most part, Gulf leaders publicly indicated that they would only support a U.S. attack if such action were authorized by the United Nations and had broad international support. Two of the Gulf states, Kuwait and Qatar, were more openly supportive of U.S. plans.⁷¹

The fall of the Saddam Hussein regime initially generated a sense of relief by removing the principal conventional threat to the Gulf states' security. However, instability and violence in Iraq, coupled with Arab perceptions of an emboldened and potentially hostile Iran, have created new shared fears among Gulf leaders. Specifically, Gulf leaders fear that escalating sectarian violence in Iraq could draw in Iraq's neighbors and bring them into conflict with Iran. The rise of Shiite Islamist factions in post-Saddam Iraq has compounded these threat perceptions. Several of the Gulf states have substantial Shiite populations but most Gulf Shiite communities consider themselves to be under-represented in government and to lack key economic opportunities. Gulf governments also generally believe that parts of Iraq could become a safe-haven for terrorists if the Iraqi government were to collapse or the United States were to withdraw militarily from Iraq without ensuring that Iraqi forces were adequately trained and equipped.

In response to these and other concerns, the Gulf states and the United States have renewed security discussions under the framework of so-called "GCC plus two" (GCC plus Egypt and Jordan) consultations and the Gulf Security Dialogue.⁷² The United States has deployed additional aircraft carrier strike groups and Patriot air defense systems to the Gulf region and reportedly has expanded intelligence-sharing with U.S. allies. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates have requested sophisticated U.S. weapons systems to improve their ability to secure maritime transport routes and to deter potential Iranian military attacks in the event of conflict.

Egypt⁷³

Iraq is not Egypt's highest foreign policy priority in the Middle East, but Iraq's stability and unity greatly affect Egypt's position as a regional power. Egypt identifies itself as part of the "moderate" bloc of Sunni Arab governments which are partially aligned with U.S. interests in the region (e.g., peace with Israel, regional stability) and opposed to Iran and its regional ambitions. Iranian foreign policy runs counter to Egyptian interests in the Middle East in that Iran has provided support to terrorist groups seeking to disrupt the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. From an ideological standpoint, radical Sunni Islamists in Egypt have seized upon the Iranian revolution as a model in their own attempts to overthrow the secular Mubarak regime. Thus, for Egypt, Iraq is a battleground of sorts in which Iranian influence

⁷¹ Both governments hosted buildups of U.S. forces and equipment that were used in the offensive against Iraq. Kuwait, which wanted to see its former invader, Saddam Hussein, overthrown, hosted the bulk of the personnel and equipment used in the ground assault.

⁷² See CRS Report RL34322, *The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sale Proposals*, by Christopher M. Blanchard and Richard F. Grimmett.

⁷³ Prepared by Jeremy M. Sharp, Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs.

must be checked. In an April 2006 interview with *Al Arabiya* television, President Hosni Mubarak accused Shiites in Iraq and elsewhere of being loyal to Iran, remarking that, “there are Shiites in all these countries of the region, significant percentages, and Shiites are mostly always loyal to Iran and not the countries where they live.... Naturally Iran has an influence over Shiites who make up 65 percent of Iraq’s population.”⁷⁴

The Egyptian public’s opposition to the Iraq war precluded the government from publicly supporting the United States. Nevertheless, Egypt expedited the passage of U.S. warships through the Suez Canal prior to (and during) Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, allowed U.S. overflights en route to the Persian Gulf, and has provided some training for Iraq’s security forces in Egypt. Egypt’s envoy to Iraq, who was expected to become the first ambassador to Iraq named by an Arab government, was kidnaped and murdered in July 2005. Significant numbers of Egyptians have traveled to Iraq to fight U.S. and Iraqi forces, raising concern about their eventual return to Egypt.⁷⁴

Israel⁷⁵

On November 22, 2006, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert claimed, “Iraq without Saddam Hussein is so much better for the security and safety of the State of Israel,” and praised President Bush for his leadership.⁷⁶ Olmert later added that the removal of Saddam was a “major, major contribution to stability in our part of the world.”⁷⁷ Yet, Israelis had not viewed Iraq as a significant threat after the first Gulf war and other Israeli voices have been skeptical about the chances of achieving the U.S. goal of bringing democracy to the region via the second war.

Many in Israel are very concerned that, as a result of the war in Iraq, an arc of Iranian-led Shiite enemies of Israel, including Iran, a Shiite-led Iraq, Alawite-led Syria, and a Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon has emerged. Some maintain that a permanently weak Iraq would interrupt this geographical/ideological/sectarian formation and, therefore, would be in Israel’s interest. Others see the need for a stronger Iraq to act as a counterpoise to an Iran elevated by the removal of Saddam Hussein from Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Decentralization or partition of Iraq might accomplish the goals of the former analysts. There have been reports that Israelis are training the Iraqi Kurdish militia (*peshmerga*) and that Israelis of Kurdish origin are establishing economic ties in northern Iraq. Iraqi Kurdish leaders deny

⁷⁴ Of the approximately 1,100 foreign fighters killed or captured by U.S. forces in Iraq over the prior twelve months year, over 20% were Egyptian nationals. Remarks by Major General William Caldwell, News Briefing, November 20, 2006.

⁷⁵ Prepared by Carol Migdalovitz, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

⁷⁶ Speech to biennial national convention of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of American, in Jerusalem, cited in “Olmert: Israel Safer Post-Saddam and After Lebanon War,” *Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 2006.

⁷⁷ Remarks at annual meeting with Daily Newspaper Editors’ Committee, December 7, 2006, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*.

these reports, while Israeli officials insist that they continue to see Iraq as one unit.⁷⁸

As the debate about the future of U.S. forces in Iraq has intensified, some Israeli analysts have suggested that no Israeli interest would be served by a continued U.S. presence in Iraq. They argue that Israel's main interest is in not having the United States, Israel's preeminent ally and benefactor, perceived as a weak or failing power. In their view, Israel is less safe to the extent that the United States is so perceived.⁷⁹ The late Israeli pundit Ze'ev Schiff suggested that Israel could look forward to a radical Arab shift that will strengthen extremists if Arabs interpret America's withdrawal as a sign of defeat.⁸⁰ In a March 12, 2007, speech, Prime Minister Olmert warned against the consequences of a "premature" U.S. withdrawal, arguing that a negative outcome would harm Israel, the Gulf States, and the stability of the Middle East as well as the ability of the United States to address threats emerging from Iran.⁸¹ In the same vein, Israel's Ambassador to the United States Sallai Meridor expressed hope that the withdrawal from Iraq would be done "in such a way that does not strengthen Iran and Al Qaeda or boost organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, so that we don't face a new eastern front from Iran to Kfar Saba (center of Israel)."⁸² Others added that Israel fears that if the U.S. withdrawal is seen as a victory for Iran, then Syria might consider military options to recover the Golan Heights.⁸³ Some of these sentiments may have influenced H.Rept. 110-60, March 20, 2007, to accompany H.R. 1591, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for FY2007, which states, "The fight in Iraq is also critical to the future of Israel. A failure in Iraq will further destabilize the region, posing a direct threat to Israel. We must not let that occur to our friend and ally."

Olmert disagreed strongly with the conclusions of the Iraq Study Group Report that a positive outcome in Iraq is linked to achieving Israeli-Arab peace. He specifically rejected the Report's suggestion to engage Syria in order to get its help regarding Iraq before Damascus ends support for Palestinian terrorist groups and the Lebanese Hezbollah, although his more recent statements have not included those preconditions. Perhaps to counter the "Shiite crescent," the Prime Minister has

⁷⁸ See Seymour M. Hersh, "Plan B; Annals of National Security," *New Yorker*, Vol. 80, Issue 17, June 28, 2004. Umit Enginsoy and David Judson, "Israel Denies Helping Iraqi Kurds, sees One Iraq," *Turkish Daily News*, April 20, 2007. Others suggest that Israeli trainers are former members of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and not soldiers on active duty.

⁷⁹ Dion Nissenbaum, "U.S. Policy Stirs Israeli Backlash; Prolonged War in Iraq Puts Jewish State at Greater Risk, Analysts Increasingly Say," McClatchy printed in *The Sacramento Bee*, January 15, 2007.

⁸⁰ Ze'ev Schiff, "US Withdrawal in Iraq to Strengthen Arab Extremists Around Israel," *Ha'aretz*, April 20, 2007.

⁸¹ For text of speech, see [<http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/PMSpeaks/speechaipac130307.htm>].

⁸² Interview by Tal Schneider, *Ma'ariv*, April 27, 2007, OSC Document GMP20070427754006.

⁸³ Hussein Agha, "The Last Thing the Middle East's Main Players Want is US Troops to Leave Iraq...," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2007.

reached out to moderate Sunni states with which Israel has no ties. This was evident in his reference in a November 26, 2006, speech to “positive parts” of the 2002 Saudi peace initiative and offer to meet Saudi officials. (It was reported that Olmert met with a Saudi National Security Advisor Prince Bandar in September 2006.)⁸⁴ In addition, some Israelis have expressed concern that Israel might be left alone to face an Iranian nuclear threat if the Bush Administration follows the Report’s advice to engage Iran over Iraq and those talks involve acceptance of Iran’s nuclear ambitions.⁸⁵

Issues for Congress

The divergent interests and policies of Iraq’s neighbors and the United States’ need to reconcile its policy in Iraq with the pursuit of wider regional interests create a challenging context for U.S. policy makers and Members of Congress. During the first session of the 110th Congress, Members will consider policy proposals designed to modify U.S. policy in Iraq and to ensure comprehensive regional and international support for Iraq’s stabilization. The following section reviews stated U.S. objectives in Iraq and the region and outlines how Congress may influence the Administration’s use of various instruments of national power to pursue them.

U.S. Regional Interests and Concerns

Maintaining Political Stability and Energy Security. The security and stability of the Persian Gulf region and its energy resources are of critical strategic and economic importance to the United States and the wider international community. Insurgency and sectarian violence in Iraq have created unique political challenges and security threats for Iraq’s neighbors, contributing to regional uncertainty and insecurity. Disputes between Iran and the United States over Iraq, Iran’s nuclear program, and Iranian support for terrorist groups opposed to peace with Israel also heighten regional tension. The U.S. military presence in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East remains politically unpopular in the region in spite of a measure of support from Sunni Arab-led governments and Sunni citizens’ fears of terrorist threats and possible Iranian ambitions. Insurgent attacks on Iraqi oil infrastructure continue and similar attacks have been attempted by terrorist organizations in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Greater coordination between the United States and its regional allies may improve U.S. chances of meeting and overcoming these challenges. However, local political developments will continue to affect U.S. efforts to shape the region’s strategic landscape.

Eliminating Transnational Terrorist Threats. The success of U.S. efforts to contain terrorist elements within Iraq and reduce the flow of foreign fighters to and from Iraq remains largely dependent on cooperation from Iraqi political parties and

⁸⁴ Greg Myre, “Israeli Premier and Saudi Said to Hold Secret Meeting,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2006.

⁸⁵ “Israel Fears US Plans to Involve Syria, Iran in Iraq Diplomacy,” *Voice of Israel*, BBC Monitoring Middle East, December 6, 2006.

regional governments. The concern over potential Iraqi government cooperation with terrorist groups that drove U.S. policy toward Iraq in 2002 and early 2003 has given way to a wider concern that instability in Iraq has created safe-havens for expanded operations by Al Qaeda and regional terrorist entities such as the PKK. The Iraq Study Group report concluded that although Al Qaeda's presence in Iraq remains relatively small, its organization there could grow in an atmosphere of instability or if a prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces provided it with a propaganda victory. Coalition and Iraqi military forces are continuing their efforts to eliminate foreign Al Qaeda operatives and to separate nationalist Iraqi insurgent elements and tribal groups from terrorist organizations.

Managing the Rise of Iran. Iran's role in the strategic balance of the Persian Gulf region has been a central policy concern for the United States since the Second World War. The removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and the disbanding of Iraq's armed forces removed the region's principal military counterweight to Iran. The subsequent political successes of Iraq's Shiite Arab majority has created new opportunities for the expansion of Iran's political influence. However, some built-in barriers to the spread of Iranian influence in the region persist, such as political divisions among Iraq's Shiite Arab population, Arab-Persian ethnic and linguistic differences, and policy coordination mechanisms such as the GCC and the Arab League. Israel and the Sunni Arab-led governments of the region largely share U.S. apprehension about Iran's regional ambitions, its nuclear program, and the potential consequences of armed confrontation with Iran. Political sensitivities and the priorities of individual governments will continue to complicate U.S. consultations and cooperation with these countries and their citizens with regard to Iran.

Promoting Political and Economic Reform. The Bush Administration has made the advancement of political and economic reform a centerpiece of its Middle East policy agenda. In some countries, governments and interest groups have carried out parallel reform efforts to increase political participation and broaden economic development, fueled by shared concerns about the potential for political dissatisfaction and limited economic prospects among young, growing populations. Reformer and their opponents have closely monitored the course of the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq and the establishment of the democratically elected, yet politically divided Iraqi government. Some observers have suggested that events in Iraq have encouraged Islamist parties, opposition groups, and minorities to push for greater representation and reform, while others warn that Iraq's instability and political paralysis have tarnished the image of groups promoting political and economic change. In the event of continuing or widening conflict in Iraq, regional governments and their citizens may begin to favor steps that promote short term stability and security at the expense of reforms designed to meet long term development goals and requirements.

Policy Options

Of the policy options currently under review by the Administration and Congress, proposals for greater diplomatic engagement, efforts to contain the negative effects of conflict to Iraq, and potential responses to hostile regional intervention are the most relevant to congressional consideration of U.S. policy toward Iraq's neighbors and other regional governments. For Members of the 110th

Congress, consideration of annual appropriations and authorization legislation, as well as ongoing oversight activities and outreach efforts by individual members and committees will provide opportunities to discuss these and other proposals and recommendations and to influence their implementation.

Regional Diplomatic Engagement. Many of the Iraq Study Group's recommendations proposed increased regional, multi-lateral, and international diplomacy, and the Administration has taken steps since late 2006 to expand engagement with Iraq's neighbors, including Syria and Iran. The unifying theme of the Group's regional diplomacy recommendations (Recommendations 1 through 18) is a "diplomatic offensive to deal with the problems of Iraq and of the region." As a complement to this "offensive," the Iraq Study Group recommends the creation of a "Support Group" made up of Iraq, its immediate neighbors, key regional states such as Egypt and the Arab Gulf states; the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; the European Union; and other interested countries. Many observers have noted that such a group has begun to coalesce in the form of the United Nations-sponsored International Compact for Iraq. Similar ideas were included in several resolutions introduced in the 109th Congress, including S.J.Res. 36, S.Res. 470, S.J.Res. 33, and S. 1993, although several of these bills also provided for timetables for a U.S. withdrawal.⁸⁶ The Iraq Study Group also recommended direct U.S. engagement with Syria and Iran (Recommendations 9 through 12), and the resolution of outstanding Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian disputes as part of a comprehensive regional peace initiative (Recommendations 13 through 17).

From early 2003 through early 2007, the United States engaged regularly with Iraq's neighbors on Iraq-related issues of common concern, with the exception of Syria and Iran.⁸⁷ U.S.-supported diplomatic efforts include the international conference on Iraq that was held in November 2004, in Sharm al Shaykh, Egypt, which included high level representatives from Iraq, its key neighbors (including Iran and Syria), the G-8, the United Nations, the European Union, the Arab League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.⁸⁸ Select multilateral fora, such as the meetings of the U.N.-sponsored International Compact for Iraq, also provided opportunities for U.S. officials to hear from and potentially interact with Iraq's neighbors, including their Iranian and Syrian counterparts.

Although many U.S. engagement efforts from 2003 through 2007 focused on the so-called "GCC plus two" group, which includes the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council plus Jordan and Egypt, engagement with Syria and Iran has expanded since early 2007. The International Compact for Iraq was adopted in May

⁸⁶ All four bills were read twice and referred to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

⁸⁷ Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell traveled to Syria in May 2003 in an unsuccessful attempt to secure Syria's support for U.S. counterterrorism policy and U.S. efforts to stabilize Iraq. After the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, widely blamed on Syrian agents, Secretary of State Rice recalled U.S. Ambassador Margaret Scobey to Washington for consultations. She has not been replaced.

⁸⁸ See *Agence France Presse*, "List of Participants at Iraq Conference," November 22, 2004; "Egypt: Summit's Final Communiqué Reaffirms Iraqi Sovereignty, Unity," OSC Document GMP20041124000066, November 24, 2004.

2007 at a two-day summit in Sharm al Shaykh, at which U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallam. As described above, the Administration also has opened discussions with Iranian government representatives regarding Iraq, and a working group chaired by the U.S. and Iranian ambassadors to Iraq has begun meeting in Baghdad. In August 2007, the United States participated as observer in a regional meeting on securing Iraq's borders held in Damascus. Iraqi leaders and political figures continue to conduct high-level discussions of their own with neighboring governments, including those of Iran and Syria. Current engagement efforts focus on a series of ministerial conferences of Iraq's neighbors: the last was held in November in Istanbul, Turkey, and the next meeting is scheduled for April 2008 in Kuwait.

Iraqis generally have welcomed regional mediation initiatives since 2003, but some efforts, such as an October 2006 religious dialogue conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia,⁸⁹ have suffered from a lack of direct participation by some key Iraqi religious scholars and political figures. The Arab League's Special Committee on Iraq has been attempting to convene a regionally supported national reconciliation conference for Iraqis since late 2005, when prominent Iraqis met in Cairo and adopted a common statement recognizing "resistance" as a "legitimate right" distinct from terrorism and calling for a timetable for U.S. withdrawal.⁹⁰ In early December 2006, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki told reporters that his government accepts regional and international diplomatic intervention, "but not on the premise that it finds solutions on its own, but in light of what the national unity government wants."⁹¹

The key questions with regard to diplomatic outreach proposals and new Administration engagement initiatives remain: how much political and material support will Iraq's neighbors be willing to provide to sustain the implementation of reconciliation arrangements; and, which Iraqis will be willing to cooperate with regionally supported initiatives? Statements agreed to and commitments made by Iraqis and their neighbors in regional conferences held since 2003 generally have not been implemented. Critics of a new expanded diplomatic approach argue that Iraq's neighbors are unlikely to abandon the pursuit of their individual national interests in favor of a collective settlement, and that Iraq's constituent political and ethnic groups are unlikely to give up their pursuit of parochial interests in favor of national unity.⁹² In particular, many critics argue that Iran and Syria, strengthened by the difficulties faced by the U.S. military in Iraq and cognizant of the need to carefully manage their respective confrontations with the United States over Lebanon and nuclear

⁸⁹ See closing statement at [http://www.oic-oci.org/english/conf/iraq-meeting/makka-doc.htm].

⁹⁰ Jonathan Wright, "Iraq's Arab Neighbors Meet, Afraid of Chaos," *Reuters*, December 5, 2006; and "Closing Statement of Iraqi Meeting Calls For Supporting Iraqi Political Process," *Cairo Nile News TV*, OSC Document GMP20051121710037, November 21, 2005.

⁹¹ John O'Neil, "Maliki Urges Regional Meeting on Stabilizing Iraq," *New York Times*, December 5, 2006.

⁹² See Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Bartering with Nothing," *The Weekly Standard*, Volume 12, Issue 11, November 27, 2006; and Frederick W. Kagan, *Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq - Phase I Report*, American Enterprise Institute, January 5, 2007, pp. 40-2.

technology development, are unlikely to cooperate fully with a comprehensive U.S.-led diplomatic initiative on Iraq.

Containment Strategies. The ability of the Iraqi people and their leaders to resolve outstanding political differences and to eliminate security threats from militias, insurgents, terrorists, and criminal organizations may remain chronically limited or deteriorate significantly. In the event that greater international engagement and support or enhanced U.S. stabilization and training efforts fail to produce reconciliation and renewed security, U.S. efforts to contain the negative effects of continued insurgency, civil conflict, and criminality in Iraq may become necessary in order to preserve wider regional interests. Policy proposals in support of “containment strategies” may require congressional authorization, new appropriations, or expanded oversight, and could include

- appropriation and authorization requests for increased levels of military and counterterrorism assistance for some of Iraq’s neighbors;
- border security cooperation and/or joint efforts to target transnational groups of primary concern to the U.S. and Iraq’s neighbors, such as the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) and Al Qaeda in Iraq;
- initiatives to limit the illicit sale of Iraqi oil;
- modification of sanctions laws targeting Iran, Syria, or introduction of new sanctions legislation targeting other governments;
- efforts to restrict the reverse flow of foreign fighters and other combatants from Iraq; or
- the provision of emergency support for humanitarian operations.

Responding to Hostile Regional Intervention. Most observers believe that continued violence in Iraq is less likely to spark a conventional war between Iraq’s neighbors than it is to lead Iraq’s neighbors to intervene and potentially confront each other in the future via unconventionally supported Iraqi proxies. Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq during 2007 and early 2008 demonstrated the difficulties that direct intervention can create. Increased Iranian materiel and intelligence support for Shiite militias or new Sunni Arab support to Sunni insurgent groups or tribal militias would each challenge the Congress and the Administration in unique ways. The status of U.S. relations with Iraq’s neighbors could change drastically based on the conduct of Iraqi government forces during any overt interventions, the content and amounts of provided support, and the behavior of proxy elements. For Members of Congress, weighing these factors when considering bilateral relationships may prove difficult: observers of past regional conflicts that have featured external interventions (i.e. Lebanon’s civil war and the anti-Soviet conflict in Afghanistan) emphasize that support for proxy groups rarely translates to direct control over proxies’ activities and can have unintended and unexpected consequences over the long term.